

DRAFT NOTES--Not For Circulation Without Permission

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A Proposal Toward Reopening Test Ban Negotiations

Steve Ladd had suggested in January that this was a good time for the Soviets to accept the earlier Reagan offer to attend a US test at the National Test Site in Nevada, on condition that Reagan would send US observers to the Soviet site to "watch them not testing." This would not only appear forthcoming, but focus world attention--prior to March 31!--on the asymmetry. And it would maximize pressure for the President to join the moratorium. (I and others had voiced this same thought at the initiation of the Soviet moratorium in August 1985.)

I pointed out to Steve, however, that the President was almost certain not to join the moratorium anyway. And the Soviets were not very likely to extend it again. If they had set a precedent of allowing US observers at their test site when they were not testing, they would feel compelled to allow observers when they renewed testing. This might seem to "legitimate the process of nuclear testing," the argument they used in July, 1985 in rejecting Reagan's proposal.

On the other hand, at that time they were trying to exert maximum pressure on the US to join the moratorium they were about to commence on August 6, 1985. It would not have served that purpose to agree in advance to participate, as observers, in the next US test, in effect "accepting" the US decision not to join the moratorium. Nor would it have been helpful to their purpose to make an implicit promise, which the US was inviting them to do, to allow US observers at their next test, since the announced aim of their moratorium was to achieve a total end to testing on both sides, by encouraging the US to join them before January 1, 1986. They were not interested in encouraging expectations, then or throughout the fall, as to what they would do when they resumed testing, in effect predicting failure of their initiative.

But that time--of appearing hopeful about the success of this particular moratorium--is past, or soon will be. Whatever worth there is in pressure for the US to join the moratorium by March 31, this particular move by the Soviets would not be likely to add to it significantly. Nor are they likely to respond to appeals to extend the moratorium yet again, in the absence of any movement by the US Government in their direction; nor is it clear that they should. Repeatedly extending the deadline in the absence of any apparent interest by the U.S. government could appear "unserious." It would not clearly enhance the prospects of an eventual mutual moratorium or negotiated test ban.

Indeed, if Soviet testing is likely to resume sometime (given the unlikelihood of Reagan joining the moratorium, before or after the next Summit), then it can be argued that the world would receive this disappointment better (it would hurt detente and demoralize the anti-nuclear movement least) if Soviet testing resumed this spring, after failure of this "extra mile," than just before the Summit or just after it.

But let us consider the merits of Ladd's suggestion at the point, after March 31, when Soviet testing is about to resume, or has just resumed. There would be then no issue of legitimizing testing--since both sides were doing it, however reluctantly in the case of the SU--or of sabotaging the prospects of a mutual moratorium in the short run. If both sides were to exchange observers at their test site--repeatedly, permanently, or even for one or two tests--this would be seen in the US not only as Soviet "flexibility" and forthcomingness in accepting a Reagan proposal, but as spectacular evidence of the Soviets' willingness to meet requirements of verification, including on-site inspection.

Gorbachev's mention of his openness to on-site inspection in his comprehensive proposal drew widespread comment in the US. It was generally described, incorrectly, as a first move for the Soviets in this direction, without precedent; but this didn't hurt its reception! To accept Reagan's proposal and match it with a Soviet invitation to US observers at a Soviet test would be dramatic confirmation of the sincerity of this recent formal proposal. It would also soften significantly the negative impact on the morale of the worldwide antinuclear movement, of Soviet resumption of testing, which would otherwise be seen only as marking the failure of the Soviet effort to achieve a bilateral moratorium.

But would this merely serve the cause of moving toward ratification of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty? After all, "calibration" at the respective test sites is relevant almost exclusively to the problem of determining the exact yield of the test. This in turn is relevant only to the verification that a threshold is not being exceeded, i.e., to the requirements of verifying the Threshold Test Ban Treaty (which has been signed but never submitted to the Senate for ratification). It is not necessary to the verification of a Comprehensive Test Ban, where the issue is whether a test has been conducted at all, not how large a yield (over a few kilotons) has been tested.

I have read more than once that the Soviets now deprecate the significance of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty (which they negotiated somewhat reluctantly in the first place, and perhaps now regret, on the grounds that it is no substitute for a CTB (true) which is their real objective. Whatever the limitations of a CTB in moderating or stopping the nuclear arms race at this point, a Threshold Test Ban Treaty (like the Partial Test Ban Treaty before it) will have no effect at all on it. Thus it is

said that they now regard it as a detour and distraction rather than a step towards a CTB. (This came up when Reagan made his offer in July of exchanging observers at test sites, in obvious reference to the TTBT. At that time, as discussed above, the Soviets preferred to focus attention on their proposal of a mutual moratorium on all underground testing and the negotiation of a CTB). But when I asked an official at the Soviet Consulate in San Francisco whether the Soviets were still interested in ratification of the TTBT, he answered, "Certainly. It is a step in the right direction, and we are interested in any such step."

Even so, I am not proposing that the drama of an exchange of observers be spent on reopening the issue of the TTBT and moving toward its ratification. This could even be counterproductive, if such ratification did serve--as the Administration would wish--as a political substitute for a CTBT. What would serve the goal of an eventual treaty banning all nuclear tests (signing and ratification of which would almost surely need to wait till Reagan left office) would be for a Soviet offer of an exchange of observers at national nuclear test sites to be made conditional on the reopening of formal negotiations toward a Comprehensive Test Ban.

The US has, after all, committed itself to pursue such negotiations (and, indeed, to seek their earliest success) in the Partial Test Ban Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty, both ratified by the Senate (and thus the highest law of our land) as well as in the signed but not ratified Threshold Test Ban Treaty.

According to William Epstein, formerly head of disarmament in the UN Secretariat, writing in the current issue the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (February, 1986, p. 28):

"Until the advent of the Reagan Administration, all parties had seemed to agree that a comprehensive ban was the first priority, and the only obstacle was the question of verification. The United States has now downgraded a ban to a long-term goal and gives top priority to deep cuts in the numbers of nuclear weapons."

"Many countries regarded this change as a violation of the commitments undertaken by the United States...."

The Soviet Union, if it made such an offer, would simply be calling on the US to fulfill its past commitments--to continue negotiations to stop all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time--a demand made in Geneva last September by every one of its co-signers to the Non-Proliferation Treaty represented at the review conference except the UK. The same demand was made the next month at the UN in two resolutions, one sponsored by Mexico and Sweden, the other by Australia and New Zealand. Both passed by

overwhelming majorities, the first by 124 to 3, the second by 116 to 4. The first was opposed only by the US, UK and France; on the second they were joined by Grenada. (The Soviet Union supported both; China abstained on both). (Epstein, pp. 29-30).

This the Soviet Union has proposed often before. But this time it would be accompanying the proposal with the unprecedented offer of an immediate exchange of observers at test sites, during negotiations rather than after a treaty has been negotiated, signed and ratified. Although conditional upon the resumption of CTB negotiations, this offer would otherwise signify Soviet acceptance of a Reagan proposal; the Administration could hardly pass up the opportunity to take credit for this. It would almost guarantee "serious" reception of the overall proposal, or at least of "interesting, intriguing, promising new elements in the proposal," as in the Washington response to the Gorbachev proposal in January with its inclusion of the zero-option for intermediate weapons (conditional on an overall package including restraints on SDI.) This despite probable Administration frustration in private at the new, more dramatic pressure toward negotiating a CTB.

The issue is: How desirable is it to pressure Reagan into negotiations on a CTB? That is not only a question for the Soviet Union. The example of START demonstrates that "negotiations" can be prolonged endlessly without any outcome or even real progress whatever, and without any political penalty for this to Reagan. Indeed, looking back, it is clear that the enormous demonstrations and other political activism both in Europe and in the US in 1981 and 1982 had almost the sole practical effect of forcing Reagan into "negotiations," which, to be sure, he and certain members of his Administration entered most reluctantly and with misgivings, but which in fact effectively undercut the political pressure upon him without forcing him to modify his actual programs at all nor to agree to any mutual restraints.

This experience has left many, including me, with great skepticism about calling, simply, for "negotiations" to be conducted by an Administration so determined to stall indefinitely to avoid agreement, and so obviously capable of managing this without suffering politically. "Negotiations" under Reagan have come for me to have the ring of a placebo designed effectively to pacify the public and neutralize dissent, so as to continue an arms buildup unhindered. In fact, we should have learned to expect, and to fear, that precisely "negotiations" (without issue, except for the demobilization of our movement) will be Reagan's "response" if our political pressure is powerful enough to force him to respond at all.

Thus, tactics whose aim --whether explicit or implicit--was primarily to force Reagan into negotiations would have seemed grossly inadequate to me in the last few years, even as an immediate, short-run objective or "first step." Till 1984, for

example, an appropriate movement aim was to replace Reagan, and to create a political environment in which his successor would seek and achieve a comprehensive moratorium and freeze, not just negotiate toward them. And it always seemed to me that earlier and stronger effort was called for to force Congress to cut off funds for the testing, production or deployment of various weapons, unilaterally for some (MX) and conditionally upon Soviet behavior for others. But since 1984-85, some lowering of short-run ambitions seems reasonable, to speak euphemistically.

The question still remains: given almost negligible prospects that Reagan, even if he were successfully forced into negotiations, would sign an agreement, is a call for CTB negotiations or tactics designed simply to produce such negotiations worth any effort or thought at all?

I think the answer right now is yes. First, former concerns about possible negative impact of this Reagan response hardly apply in the current political environment. There is no short-run prospect (and damn little long-run) of attainable achievements that would be side-tracked by this "minimal" activity. Nor is there much of a movement to be demobilized, or morale to be lost, by failing to achieve more. On the contrary, even the small but real success of wringing negotiations out of a Reagan obviously extremely reluctant to enter them on this issue would be a notable boost, to a movement that hasn't had many in the last three years.

But I am not looking only for movement placebos. The real merit of an approach that would achieve negotiations--and even short of that, achieve an international movement for negotiations and a test ban that would effectively put Reagan on the defensive in resisting it--would be to keep the issue of the desirability and attainability of a test ban alive for the next three years and to produce a Democratic candidate committed to signing a test ban treaty early in his administration.

The alternative, given the likely imminent resumption of Soviet testing and recognition that the Soviet moratorium and recent proposals have failed, is that the test ban issue slips once again totally from public consciousness, with no real incentive for any Democratic candidate to raise it in primaries, the national campaign, or as a priority objective if he wins.

In saying that this imminent result is worth avoiding, I am not saying that the comprehensive test ban is, in my own opinion, either a logically necessary first step or the measure of the highest practical urgency in halting and reversing the arms race and reducing the risks of nuclear war. The latter place goes to a moratorium and ban on ASAT and Star Wars testing and to a moratorium and ban on the testing and deployment of new MIRV'd missiles. The exclusive emphasis on the test ban by the majority

of nations in the UN and at the NPT Review Conference probably expresses a view of the relative attainability of various measures in the short run. This in turn reflects the long-held and unique international near-consensus on the importance of achieving a test ban and the degree of success achieved in negotiations toward this by 1978.

The last point suggests why it is that the Reagan Administration has been so adamant in resisting calls to reopen negotiations on a test ban, even after they have learned in the START and INF talks in Geneva how such negotiations can be used to their advantage. The difference is that a reasonable test ban agreement is already so near to achievement, after the negotiations in 1978. Moreover, the issues are relatively much simpler and hard to obfuscate; and there is international expertise (and capability) on verification. In short, it would be very much harder to stall, once Reagan had actually entered negotiations.

It is tempting to imagine that he could even, then, be forced or shamed into signing an agreement. That is almost surely unrealistic. What it does mean is that, once in negotiations, his explanations for stalling or resisting signing would become increasingly controversial and embarrassing to him, a situation conducive to making this issue--and arms control in general!--a major issue in Congress and the 1988 Presidential campaign.

Many parts of the antinuclear movement--including the Freeze Campaign and SANE--have coordinated in focussing their efforts in 1986 on the "immediate" achievement of a test ban. Insofar as their activists actually pin their hopes and their measurement of useful effect on the actual signing of a test ban treaty under Reagan, or a mutual moratorium in the next year or so, they are almost surely heading for one more disappointment.

But it may not take a massive grassroots effort, on the scale of 1982, to achieve the much less ambitious task of getting Reagan into negotiations in 1986. That would be part of a longer-term effort to achieve a test ban--and much else, essentially the start of the Gorbachev program (as modified above)--in 1989, under a Democratic President committed to these goals. That would take widespread grassroots interest and involvement by late 1987. And ongoing CTB negotiations, in which Reagan's reluctance was publicly evident and a subject of controversy and international criticism, could greatly contribute to that.

Why stress this particular issue, as the pivot of a dialectical process aiming at 1988-89? Because in the light of the past history of this issue, US commitments and negotiating experience, and international opinion, Reagan's refusal even to negotiate on this matter is a peculiar vulnerability in his arms control stance, possibly an Achilles heel.

Although Administration officials --so long as there is almost no public attention on the issue--can get away with talking about "our need to test new weapons even if verification of a test ban were achievable," that won't go over very reliably with a public that has started to listen. And if the Soviet Union, as suggested here, showed a convincing willingness to allow even on-site inspection, by inviting observers during testing and during negotiations, the public's carefully-inculcated fixation on the verification issue and on-site inspection should at last weigh in on the side of attaining a test ban.

But would the US public even be made aware by the US media that the Soviet offer had been made? After the near-total media blackout on the Soviet moratorium from August 6, 1985 on, the Soviets would have a right to be skeptical. But in this case, the story would be, in part, that Gorbachev had picked up a Reagan proposal. As in the case of the zero-option in Europe, the White House would be strongly motivated to play this up, publicizing the overall proposal in the process.

What is proposed here for the Soviet Union is that they use their ability to offer on-site inspection at their test site for the limited and specific purpose of getting CTB negotiations underway. They would do this at the point that they decide to terminate their unilateral moratorium. Indeed--though one would not want to hurry that decision, if they have any inclination to renew the deadline once again--they would have to be testing again, or to be about to begin, to make this offer.

Their position would presumably be, from then on: "We want negotiations immediately, and a test ban treaty as soon as possible. Meanwhile, we have now adequately demonstrated our good faith desire for an immediate cessation of explosions. There will be no more unilateral moratoriums by us; but we will commence a mutual moratorium the day the US is ready for one." Precisely that position could create support in Congress--with pressure from the public--to "test the sincerity" of this Soviet claim by cutting off funds for testing warheads, conditionally upon Soviet cessation: if negotiations did ensue and Reagan stonewalled. The slogan of the antinuclear movement could be: "Stop Testing Warheads, Start Testing the Soviets!" (or, "Test the Soviets, Not Warheads").

Many other nations could help the prospects of a test ban, and are apparently right now in the process of doing so. Epstein points out that in last fall's UN session, 121 nations voted in favor of holding a conference to amend the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty in order to make it into a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Requests by only 37 signers of the PTBT can force the calling of such a convention. Amendments that would convert it into a CTB require only the support of 57 signers--obviously forthcoming--plus the agreement of the Soviet Union, which would give it, and the US and UK, who would not. Thus, the amendments would "fail"; but in doing so, would dramatically highlight the almost total

isolation of the US and UK on this issue among the signers of the PTBT and NPT.

This may well take place. Meanwhile, the House is likely to join the Senate in voting a resolution asking the President to reopen CTB negotiations and to submit the Threshold Test Ban Treaty for ratification. Although the US media blacked out the consensus declaration of the NPT Review Conference last September emphasizing the importance of a test ban to maintaining the NPT and averting proliferation, this issue would probably catch significant public attention if once the overall issue of a test ban came into public debate.

It is in combination with such international pressures, including both US allies, neutrals and the Soviets (the latter with initiatives such as the one described here), along with a Congressional resolution, that American public movement activities, including the civil disobedience planned by the American Peace Test campaign, would have a good chance to raise that debate.

American and worldwide movement leaders should demand, of course, not only the opening of negotiations but a mutual moratorium and early achievement of a ban (along with other critical demands such as restraints on SDI and ASAT tests). But as I conceive this approach, they should not do so on the basis of unrealistic hopes, nor encourage them in others, of achieving an actual cessation of explosions immediately, or a test ban agreement under Reagan. To achieve an actual agreement they must gear themselves for at least a three-year effort.

With all this, I would think there was a very good chance, better than even, to get negotiations underway, with the US and SU trading observation teams at test sites, in 1986 or early 1987. And if Reagan refused to negotiate, despite such a Soviet offer and in the face of these international and domestic pressures, two more things might begin to emerge as far more likely than they seem just at present. One, a renewed, widespread and committed grassroots movement, aiming both at a test ban and at broader measures. Two, a genuine chance that Congress, under the pressure of such a movement and Reagan's intransigence, would come close to or even achieve majority support for cutting off funds for testing conditional upon Soviet cessation of testing. (After last year's moratorium, proponents of such a Congressional initiative could predict such a Soviet cessation in response to it much more confidently than was possible earlier).

Both of these, again, would be likely if Reagan did get into negotiations and then, as would be almost certain, tried to stall off any agreement. I would think there was, under these conditions, a 10-20% chance of an actual Congressional cutoff of testing--precisely parallel, after all, to the ASAT testing cutoff achieved last December!--even before 1989. A smallish chance, but

amazingly higher than anything I contemplated last fall, prior to the ASAT cutoff and the Gorbachev plan.

The much larger chance, well worth working hard for, is of a change in political climate by 1988-89 (including strong support in Congress for a funding cutoff, even though short of a majority) that would bring about US acceptance in 1989 of Gorbachev's offer to end nuclear testing and to act swiftly to reverse the nuclear arms race.